

Testimony for the Appropriations Committee

February 24, 2022

My name is Raquel Stabinski-Leib and I am from Norwalk. I am testifying on the Governor's proposed budget H.B. No. 5037 (COMM) AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2023 that unfortunately does not include critical funding for our safety net providers and their employees.

After decades of underfunding, Connecticut's direct support providers are in crisis mode because the effects of the pandemic have impacted their ability to attract and retain direct care workers and other employees. This staff is critically important to the safety and well-being of many of Connecticut's residents with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD), including my own family.

My 50-year-old mentally-challenged son Evan lives in a group home in Norwalk, and my hope for Evan is that he is physically, mentally and emotionally stimulated. This was the case prior to the pandemic, when Evan was thriving. He had a job and a multitude of physical and social activities that were supported by his staff. However, the pandemic changed all of that, leaving Evan languishing at a TV screen. And I understood that this was necessary; COVID was such a serious threat to everyone, and Evan needed to make the same sacrifices that we all did.

However, with vaccines and with the declining number of cases, COVID is no longer the pandemic that it once was. Yet Evan continues to devote much of his time watching TV, rather than being engaged in physical and social activities due to staffing shortages. For instance, staff are not able to take him outside for exercise on a regular basis because they need to tend to more urgent matters. I hope that this is temporary, and that Evan can go back to thriving as he did prior to the pandemic, but I don't see this happening without additional funding.

Without your help, our state's community service delivery system will continue to shrink and our loved ones will bear the brunt of this loss. We are already experiencing the worst staffing crisis that service providers have ever seen, which has resulted in an inability to resume programs paused during COVID and caused a rebound effect for family caregivers who are unable to return to work and contribute to Connecticut's economy.

Now more than ever, we need to ensure that critically necessary funding of \$150 million is included in this year's budget for the state's non-profit providers who care for our loved ones on a daily basis. We urge your support and ask that you add this funding to the budget before this committee. My Child Matters.